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ABSTRACT

Based on Erich Maria Remarque's novel "All Quiet on the Western Front" and other war literature, this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand that works of art about war can call up strong emotions in readers; and that the writing process can be applied to writing poems. The main activity of the lesson involves students in writing war poems. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:

All Quiet on the Western Front

LENGTH OF LESSON: Two class periods

GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

SUBJECT AREA: Literature

CREDIT: Alisa Soderquist, a humanities teacher at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Alexandria, Virginia.

OBJECTIVES: Students will understand the following:

1. Works of art about war can call up strong emotions in readers.

2. The writing process can be applied to writing poems.

MATERIALS:
For this lesson, you will need:

Optional: a dictionary or glossary of literary terms

PROCEDURE:

1. Acknowledge that the novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* is monumental—in the content it covers, in its sheer size, and in its impact on readers. Follow this observation with the statement that short literature—even a short poem—can have a monumental impact on readers as well. Explain that this project will involve writing poems inspired by *All Quiet on the Western Front,* first-hand war stories that students might have heard, or other works of art about war.

2. This would be a good time to have students share any first-hand stories of war experiences that they may have heard—from relatives, civic leaders, or friends. Have such stories made war seem glamorous or horrifying (or both)?

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3. Hold a brief discussion on the range of war literature that students in your class may have already encountered. Ask for volunteers to (a) name pieces of literature about war, (b) tell the class whether the piece is a patriotic call to arms or puts forth an anti-war sentiment, and (c) state what their reactions to the pieces were. War literature that high school students may have read include the following:

- Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage,* short stories such as "An Episode of War," and poems such as "War Is Kind"
- Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*
- Walt Whitman's "Beat! Beat! Drums" and "As Toilsome I Wandered Virginia's Woods"
- Randall Jarrell's "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner"
- Roald Dahl's "Beware of the Dog"
- Mary Chesnut's *Wartime Journal*

4. In a series of minilessons, as enumerated below, teach or review with students how to proceed from prewriting a poem, through writing, to revising and editing. Give students time to apply each minilesson.

Prewriting

- Open up thinking about poetic inspiration by telling students that they may get ideas for war poems from emotions they feel as they read *All Quiet* or other war literature, from a strong war image that pops into their minds, or from a word that is related to *war* and that makes a moving or unusual sound—in effect, from anything.
- Once students think they have a focused subject for a war poem—focused, perhaps, on a person, an animal, an object, a scene—show them the following list of questions, which can generate additional thoughts about their subject. Stress that students are not to feel locked in by these questions; they're only suggestions. Help with any confusion about terminology, as necessary, as students look over this list.

Notes for a Poem Content

- What is the subject of your poem?
- How does the subject make you, the poet, feel?

Wording

- What images of sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch does the subject call to mind?
- What figures of speech—metaphors, similes, personification—can you connect to your subject?
- Can you think of a phrase or a line that you'd like to repeat in various parts of the poem?

Form

- Can you at this point tell how short or long your poem will be?

- Can you tell whether each line will have the same number of beats or not?
- Can you tell whether the lines will rhyme or not?

Writing

1. Advise students to select a word or phrase that occurred to them during prewriting and to try to build a single sentence or line around it now. A second line will grow out of the first, and the first line may later wind up as the last line or not in the poem at all, but it's still critical to get that first single sentence down now.
2. As students write, they may want to follow the stanza or line form that occurred to them during prewriting—or not. They can always work on form later, after they've put sounds, words, and thoughts together in a first draft.
3. Suggest that students may want to put extra effort into the final line of the draft in order to leave the reader with a strong image or feeling.
4. Encourage students to title their poems even while first drafts.

Revising and Editing

Direct students to put their first drafts away for at least a day. When students return to the drafts, suggest the following techniques for revising and editing:

1. Check to see what the poem sounds like; that is, read it aloud.
2. Would the poem benefit from more sound devices such as alliteration or onomatopoeia?
3. Do the lines sound natural, or do they sound forced? Should you be more formal or less formal?
4. Does the poem need more sensory language to appeal to sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste?
5. Are all the words strong? For example, have you used a weak adjective and a weak noun instead of a strong noun?
6. If the poem contains fragments rather than sentences, was it indeed your intention to use fragments?
7. Most important, does the poem communicate what you want to say about war?

5. When you and your students are satisfied with their war poems—perhaps after a few rounds of peer editing—consider inviting in another class to listen to oral presentations by the poets and to offer constructive feedback.

ADAPTATIONS:

If you want a more structured approach for younger students, consider having all students start with the same line of poetry—one that you or a student invents—and see where each student takes it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *All Quiet on the Western Front* paints a picture of war that is full of terrifying, grotesque details in an attempt to persuade readers of the horrors of battle. Portrayals of war in other books, however, as well as in films and on television, often ignore the more painful side of battle to glorify fighting. Debate the ethics of how war should be depicted—not only in literature, but also in other art forms.

2. Through Paul Baumer's eyes, we see war as a horribly dehumanizing experience. Debate what experiences in war—if any—might make young soldiers *more* human.

3. Analyze whether there are any heroes presented in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. What is the nature of their heroism? Are there any villains in the novel? What makes them villainous?

4. Hitler banned *All Quiet on the Western Front* at the beginning of World War II and had copies of the novel burned. Although it is easy to condemn his acts of censorship, this may not always be the case. Is there ever justification for censorship of antiwar material? Debate the right of a government to censor certain types of antiwar media when the country is involved in a full-scale war.

5. Discuss the possible statements that Remarque might have been making by the ironic way he kills off the characters of Kat and Paul—veteran soldiers who survive many terrible fights but end up dying anyway when they aren't in battle.

6. World War I was known as a "total war" because it involved the efforts of many civilians in addition to the military. Today, however, warfare can be drastically different. How would *All Quiet on the Western Front* be different if it were told from the perspective of a modern-day American soldier during, say, the war in the Persian Gulf? What events would be different? What ideas and issues might change?

EVALUATION:

Since students will be producing original poems in several different forms, discuss with the class what overall criteria you can apply to individual poems (e.g., originality, effort, perseverance, revision) and whether you should rate each piece on a pass/fail scale or on a unacceptable/acceptable/good/excellent continuum.

EXTENSION:

Banned Books

Because *All Quiet on the Western Front* offers a gruesome portrayal of a war lost by the Germans, it infuriated Adolph Hitler, who ordered the book banned and destroyed throughout Germany. Many critics, however, consider it the best antiwar novel ever written. Ask each student to research one other famous work of literature that is generally revered by critics but that has been banned somewhere in the world or in another part of

the country. (Make sure that they choose different books and that the books they have chosen are not currently banned by your school district.) Students should investigate when, why, and by whom the book was banned as well as any attempts that were made to defend it. They should also investigate sources of praise of the literature in question. What have critics said in favor or it? When their information is complete, have your students each write a paragraph describing the banning (and reinstatement) of the book they chose. You can then create a banned books display in your school library, showing copies of the banned books along with their one-paragraph descriptions.

War Flowchart

It may seem obvious, but the decision to wage war affects a great deal more than the members of a nation's military services. World War I was thought of as a "total war," meaning that it involved civilians and civilian institutions in many different ways. Work with your students to create a war flowchart, which will provide a visual representation of how a declaration of war in an industrialized nation filters down through political and military levels to influence all aspects of society. First, have your students brainstorm a list of all the different elements of society that are affected by a nation's involvement in a war. Be sure that they take their thinking beyond the obvious—to not only military industries, for example, but also families that lose their loved ones, women who enter the workforce, and so on. When the list is complete, divide your students into groups, and ask each group to organize the items on the list into a comprehensive flowchart that traces the chain of influence down from the declaration of war to the lives of millions of private citizens. Be sure to remind students that flowcharts can contain lateral connections and reverse connections; they need not be linear and hierarchical. When the groups are finished, ask each one to share its chart with the class. You can conclude with a discussion about whether war is ever justified, given the numerous effects it can have on a people.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

End of Innocence: 1910-1920

Editors of Time-Life Books. Time-Life, Inc., 1998.

This historical reference includes full-page photographs, first-person accounts, posters, and memorabilia from the prewar and World War I time period.

Events That Shaped the Century

Editors of Time-Life Books. Time-Life, Inc., 1998.

This detailed book, which includes descriptions of major historical events, illustrates World War I with full-page photos, posters, and statistics. Readers can compare the Great War with other 20th-century battles and piece together the connecting points of important moments in world history.

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WEB LINKS:

World War 1: Trenches on the Web
This fantastic and extensive and interactive site contains everything you need to study WWI. This site contains an extensive collection of propaganda posters from the different sides, songs, primary sources and even 3-D renderings of WWI ships.
http://www.worldwar1.com/

World War I Document Archive
This archive of primary documents from World War I has a wonderful selection of documents, photographs and biographies.
http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/

Lost Poets of the Great War
A collection of the poetry of World War I.
http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/LostPoets/

The International Internet Encyclopedia of the First World War
An encyclopedia, created by students and teachers from several countries, about World War One.
http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWtitle.html

Hellfire Corner
Extensive WWI links to individual's stories and battlefield locations.
http://www.fylde.demon.co.uk/welcome.htm#CONTENTS

VOCABULARY:

devoid
Being without a usual, typical, or expected attribute or accompaniment.
Context:
Paul is finally alone and devoid of any hope.

disillusion
The condition of being disenchanted.
Context:
With the death of each friend, Paul and his comrades became more and more disillusioned.

futile
Completely ineffective.
Context:
Millions died in futile attempts to win the war.

ideology
A systematic body of concepts especially about human life or culture.
Context:
The young soldier's longing for home was much more powerful than any ideology or belief.

melancholy
Depression of spirits.
Context:
The young soldier, filled with melancholy, remembered scenes from home.

nostalgia
A wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition.
Context:
Nostalgia for home created very strong bonds among the young soldiers.

template
Something that establishes or serves as a pattern.
Context:
World War I set forth a template for the way violence would erupt in our century.

trajectory
The curve that a body in motion describes in space.
Context:
The young soldiers found themselves helpless under a crisscross of shell trajectories.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Grade Level: 6-8, 9-12

Subject Area: world history

Standard: Understands the causes and global consequences of World War I.

Benchmarks:

(6-8): Understands events that contributed to the outbreak of World War I (e.g., diverse long-range causes of World War I, such as political and economic rivalries, ethnic and ideological conflicts, militarism, imperialism, and nationalism; how nationalism threatened the balance of power among the Great Powers in Europe, and why it was considered one of the causes of World War I).

(9-12): Understands arguments and theories regarding the causes of World War I (e.g., the role of social and class conflict leading to World War I; how primary and secondary sources illustrate the arguments presented by leaders on the eve of the Great War; why and how political leaders in European nations felt aggressive foreign policy, and the advocation of war, would help subdue domestic discontent and disorder; the arguments for and against war used by diverse political groups and figures in European countries).

(9-12): Understands the extent to which different sources supported the war effort (e.g., how nationalism and propaganda helped mobilize civilian populations to support "total war"; ways in which colonial peoples contributed to the war effort of the Allies and the Central Powers by providing military forces and supplies, and what this effort might have meant to colonial subjects; the effectiveness of propaganda to gain support from neutral nations; how and why original support and enthusiasm to support the war deteriorated).

Grade Level: 6-8

Subject Area: technology

Standard: Understands the relationships among science, technology, society, and the individual.

Benchmarks:
Knows ways in which technology has influenced the course of history (e.g., revolutions in agriculture, manufacturing, sanitation, medicine, warfare, transportation, information processing, communication).

Grade Level: 6-8, 9-12

Subject Area: language arts

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts.

Benchmarks:

(6-8): Identifies specific questions of personal importance and seeks to answer them through literature.

(9-12): Understands the effects of complex literary devices and techniques on the overall quality of a work (e.g., tone, irony, mood, figurative language, allusion, diction, dialogue, symbolism, point of view, style).

(9-12): Understands historical and cultural influences on literary works.

(9-12): Makes abstract connections between his or her own life and the characters, events, motives, and causes of conflict in texts.

(9-12): Relates personal response to the text with that seemingly intended by the author.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: world history

Standard: Understands the search for peace and stability throughout the world in the 1920s and 1930s.

Benchmarks:
Understands how the emergence of new art, literature, music, and scientific theories influenced society in the early 20th century (e.g., the impact of innovative movements in art, architecture, and literature, such as Cubism, Surrealism, Expressionism, Socialist Realism, and jazz; reflections of war in such movements as Dadaism and in the literary works of Remarque, Spender, Brooke, and Hemingway; the major themes of writers of the "Lost Generation" in the post-World War I era; prominent musicians and composers of the first half of the century and the cultural impact of their music around the world; how Freud's psychoanalytic method and theories of the unconscious changed views of human motives and human nature).

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Video Information and Comprehension Questions

Video Description
Erich Maria Remarque's novel, based on his own experiences, embodies all the lost optimism of the first World War. Explore why this novel of an 18-year-old's lost innocence still stands as perhaps the greatest anti-war novel.

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Download Comprehension Questions & Answers ⊙

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

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TITLE OF VIDEO:
All Quiet on the Western Front

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the significance of the title *All Quiet on the Western Front*?

2. From whose perspective is the story of *All Quiet on the Western Front* told?

3. What specific event ignited World War I in Europe? What other factors contributed to the outbreak of the war?

4. Where was the Western Front?

5. Why does Paul Baumer feel betrayed by the adults in his life?

6. Which advancements in science and technology during World War I were depicted in the battle scenes in *All Quiet on the Western Front*?

7. Why is Paul Baumer alienated from his family and the people in his town when he goes home to visit?

8. Who were the members of the "Lost Generation"?

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All Quiet on the Western Front

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. What is the significance of the title *All Quiet on the Western Front*?
The title *All Quiet on the Western Front* is the ironic last line of the novel. These are the words of an official report stating there is no more action on the Western Front, yet the report is issued at the exact time Paul Baumer, the main character in the novel, is killed there. Ironically, it is truly "quiet" because the narrator is dead.

2. From whose perspective is the story of *All Quiet on the Western Front* told?
All Quiet on the Western Front is told through the eyes of an 18-year-old German soldier who has gone directly from the world of home and school to the nightmare of war.

3. What specific event ignited World War I in Europe? What other factors contributed to the outbreak of the war?
The assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary was the single spark that ignited World War I, but Germany's military power, its desire for more colonies, and its development into an industrial society were major factors that led to the outbreak of the war.

4. Where was the Western Front?
The Western Front was a line of fighting that reached from the North Sea south through Belgium and continued along the boundary between France and Germany.

5. Why does Paul Baumer feel betrayed by the adults in his life?
Paul feels betrayed because the adults gave him false ideas about patriotism and heroism in battle that were quickly shattered by his first experiences in war.

6. Which advancements in science and technology during World War I were depicted in the battle scenes in *All Quiet on the Western Front*?
New technologies such as the tank, rapid-firing artillery, and poison gas were all depicted in the battle scenes in *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

7. Why is Paul Baumer alienated from his family and the people in his town when he goes home to visit?
Paul Baumer feels a great gulf between himself and his family and the people in his hometown because they do not comprehend the horrors he has experienced in battle.

8. Who were the members of the "Lost Generation"?
The members of the "Lost Generation" were the young men who fought in World War I. Their experiences in battle made it difficult for those who survived to find peace in their lives after the war.

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